

House Republicans re-elect Congressional whip with ties to neo-Nazi group

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A cheer went up in the House of Representatives Tuesday as House Republicans reelected Steve Scalise as Majority Whip, a top Republican post in the chamber, despite the fact that he recently admitted to being a speaker at a white supremacist conference in 2002.

Not a hint of serious opposition to Scalise's nomination was to be found in Washington in recent days. Asked by a reporter whether President Obama believed "Scalise should stay in leadership," White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest insisted that keeping Scalise was the Republicans' prerogative. Last month, Democratic Party Representative Sean Patrick Maloney (New York) became the only member of Congress to call on Scalise to step down, but he has remained silent since then.

The appointment is a clear statement that a past relationship with a white supremacist, holocaust-denying, neo-Nazi organization does not disqualify someone from holding high office. Scalise's election was ignored in the press, with neither the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, nor *Washington Post* running articles on his election as of Tuesday night.

The election of Scalise was merely one order of business in the opening day of the 114th Congress. House Majority Leader John Boehner was re-elected despite a defection from 25 right-wing "Tea Party" Republicans. Boehner called on the Republican-controlled Congress to speedily impose various pro-business policies, including the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, as well as measures to raise the definition of full-time employment to 40 hours per week, as opposed to the current 30 hours.

On December 28, Louisiana politics blogger Lamar White revealed that Steve Scalise had spoken at a conference of the European-American Unity and Rights Organization (EURO), a white nationalist organization led by David Duke, a former KKK leader and current neo-Nazi and Holocaust denier.

The website of the group, whitecivilrights.com,

included statements such as the following: "The beautiful Germany of the 1930s with blonde children happily running through every village has been replaced with a multi-racial cesspool. Out of work Africans can be seen shuffling along the same streets, which used to be clean and safe in the days of the National Socialists."

Two days after he was exposed by White, Scalise admitted that he had in fact spoken at the conference. He claimed, however, that he was ignorant of the group's politics, despite the fact that the Best Western hotel where the conference took place had had issued a statement distancing itself from the organization, and a minor league baseball team had cancelled its reservations at the hotel fearing for their safety.

Scalise "touched on how America was founded on Christian principles, Christian men who founded this country, and how it was believed it would go forward as a Christian nation and how we're getting away from that," according to one conference participant who spoke to the *New York Times*.

Roy Fletcher, who has managed campaigns for Republican Senator John McCain, told the *Times* that although Duke "doesn't matter anymore... politicians here have still co-opted part of his message without having the same baggage," referring to Duke's former affiliation with the KKK and his openly neo-Nazi views.

Stephanie Grace, a Louisiana political reporter, told the *Times* about her first meeting with Scalise. "He told me he was like David Duke without the baggage. I think he meant he supported the same policy ideas as David Duke, but he wasn't David Duke."

Scalise was ardently defended by members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. Louisiana Democratic Representative Cedric Richmond, an African American, came to his support, absurdly claiming, "I don't think anybody thinks he shares the beliefs of this group." Republican House Speaker John Boehner likewise

defended Scalise, as did other leading Republican officials.

Lamar White, the blogger who originally exposed Scalise, said in a Monday post that “the media has given [Scalise] a pass,” with many major outlets, including Slate and the *Times-Picayune* largely accepting the claims of former KKK leader Kenny Knight that Scalise had in fact attended an earlier meeting at the hotel, instead of the conference he admitted to speaking to.

Right-wing talk-show host Bill O’Reilly took things a step further, using the opportunity of the Scalise scandal to invite David Duke onto live television, giving him four and a half minutes to freely to posture as proponent of “civil rights.” O’Reilly declared that the “media” despises Duke “and you’re not going to get a fair shake from them... because they’re sympathetic in the mainstream media to the left.”

The entire affair is a testament to the right-wing character of American politics: not only of the Republican Party, with its more overt connection to neo-fascistic organizations, but of the Democrats as well, who represent essentially the same class interests as the Republicans.

In a political system supposedly characterized by unbridgeable ideological differences between the two parties, giving rise to the constant “partisan gridlock” that leads to unpopular policies such as the 2013 “sequester” budget cuts, there is essentially unanimous agreement that it is acceptable for a man with neo-Nazi connections to be elected to one of the most powerful positions in the country.

In reality, the supposedly-unbridgeable ideologically differences between the two parties are entirely manufactured, and can be turned on and off like a spigot in order to create the best conditions for the imposition of right-wing, anti-working-class policies.



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